CHAPTER VIII.

LAND ADMINISTRATION.[1]

Colonel Wilks, who wrote about 1810, in discussing the nature of landed property in India remarks:[2] 'In India, as in Europe, the conquerors and the conquered, successively impelling and impelled, rolled forward wave after wave in a southern direction, and whoever will attentively examine the structure and the geography of that portion of India usually called the Southern Peninsula may infer *à priori* that the countries below the Ghâts, separated by a barrier scarcely penetrable from the central regions, and forbidding approach by a burning climate always formidable to the natives of the north, will have been the last visited by those invaders, and will have retained a larger portion of their primitive institutions.' He thereupon instances Kánara as a district 'which has preserved a larger portion of its ancient institutions and historical records than any other region of India,' and gives an account of its early revenue history. It must however be remembered that only that portion of the district now known as North Kánara which lies south of the Gangávali and between the Sahyádris and the sea was included in the old province of Kánara. The rest was at various times subject to various dynasties. During the first half of the eighteenth century it formed the dominions of the chief of Sonda, and at the time of the assumption of the district by the Company's Government was distinguished as Sonda. Sonda Payen Ghát or that portion of the district below the Sahyádris which is north of the Gangávali river, corresponds in its physical features with Kánara proper, but, like the Sonda Bála Ghát or uplands, it was a frontier country bordering on the territories of several different powers, and consequently the scene of constant strife and insurrection, and the inhabitants were accustomed to plunder and be plundered. The consequence is that Sonda has lost all traces of its primitive institutions almost as completely as Kánara has retained them. Even accounts relating to the time immediately prior to the accession of British rule could hardly be procured, the accountants and other village officers having conspired to withhold them when, after the fall of Seringapatam, it became known that Major Munro was marching northwards,[3] and the Collectors under the Madras Government frequently represented that they were unable to obtain any trustworthy data on which a satisfactory settlement of the land revenue could be effected.

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[1] Contributed by Mr. J. Monteath, C.S.
[2] South of India, I. 150, 151.
[3] The Honourable Mr. Harris to Board of Revenue, 14th June 1821.

The facts relating to the land revenue of what were the territories of the Rája of Sonda before their conquest by Haidar Ali in 1763 may be stated in a few words. It is mentioned in land grants or *sanads*, that a survey, which was probably only an estimate of area from inspection, was made in the second century, but it is not known what the old assessment was. Something corresponding to the system of Todar Mal, which was introduced in the Deccan by Sháh Jahán (1627-1657) appears to have been introduced into Ankola and some places above the Sahyádris by the Adil Sháh dynasty of Bijápur, probably between about 1570 and 1670.[1] The principal feature of that system was the periodical readjustment, with regard to the fluctuations in the value of money, of the money commutation for the fixed share of the produce. From certain accounts Mr. Harris inferred that in the time of the Adil Sháh dynasty there was a quinquennial scrutiny called *rekha jhadti* or assessment scrutiny which appears to have been of the same nature as Todar Mal's system of readjustment, with the additional object of detecting frauds committed by the village accountants.[2] The assessment of the Adil Sháh dynasty was regarded as the standard assessment, *rekha* or *shist*, and subsequent levies were called extras or *shámil*. It is not possible to ascertain what proportion the assessment bore to the gross produce, but the country seems to have enjoyed little prosperity for several centuries before its occupation by the Company. According to Munro its decline seems to have begun under the Muhammadan princes of Bijápur, and to have continued under its own chiefs who were successively tributaries to the Bijápur Sultáns and the Moghal Emperors, and who besides the payment of their tribute or *peshkhas*, were compelled to satisfy the rapacity of the nobles by heavy exactions from their subjects.[3] To make good the tribute an extra assessment of thirty per cent on all gardens, and 2½ to 12½ per cent on all rice fields, was imposed, and appears in the accounts as cess or *patti* under the head of *shámil* or extra.[4] Ankola was subject to the Maráthás for eleven years, but they do not seem to have had a very firm grasp of it and there is no evidence that Shiváji's revenue system was introduced.[5] Haidar and Tipu appear to have treated Sonda and Kánara alike, and the account of the revenue system of the two divisions from their time need not be written separately. The only point requiring mention is that, according to Mr. Harris,[6] in some parts of Sonda the assessment was levied in kind as late as 1770; that it amounted to two-thirds of the gross produce; and that the settlement was made by villages and village-groups or *máganis*, the headmen and accountants being left to divide the total assessment among the under-renters as they pleased. All land was held to belong to the Government. It is said that gardens were considered private property, but it appears that only the trees belonged to the owner; the property of the soil was vested in the Government.[7]

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[1] Munro's Report, 31st May 1800.
[2] Letter of Mr. Harris, 14th June 1821.
[3] Report, 31st May 1800.
[4] Munro's Report, 31st May 1800.
[5] Fryer's East India and Persia, 146.
[6] Letter to Board of Revenue, 14th June 1821.
[7] Munro's Report, 31st May 1800.